large number of prophets in ancient times, but the message of monotheism remained at the initial stage; it could not culminate in a revolution. This state continued up till the time of Christ, the last but one Prophet (May peace be upon him). The reason being that in ancient times, the system of monarchy was entrenched throughout the world. The kings, in order to secure their political interests, adopted the course of religious persecution. These kings suppressed all religious movements, which were different from the state religion. They would nip all apostasy in the bud, since they saw religion as a matter of affirming one's loyalty to the state. If a person adhered to a religion other than the state religion, he was regarded as a rebel.

> O God, You are the original source of Peace; from You is all Peace, and to You returns all Peace. So, make us live with Peace; and let us enter paradise: the House of Peace.
>
> The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ

The Prophet Isa ﷺ (May peace be upon him) was the last link in the chain of these persecutions faced by the preachers of monotheism. Then God decreed the abolition of this coercive political system, even if it entailed the use of force in order that the age of religious persecution might be brought to an end forever and replaced by the age of religious freedom. This divine plan was brought to completion through the Prophet Muhammad (May peace be upon him) and his companions. This is the command given in the Qur'an:

"And fight with them on until there is no more persecution and oppression, And religion becomes God's in its entirety, But if they cease, surely God does see all that they do." (8:39)

The Source of Peace

It is no exaggeration to say that Islam and violence are contradictory to each other. The concept of Islamic violence is so obviously unfounded that, prima facie it stands rejected. The fact that violence is not sustainable in the present world is enough to convince one that violence, as a principle, is quite alien to the scheme of things in Islam. Islam claims to be an eternal religion and such a religion cannot afford a principle in its scheme which will not be sustainable in later periods of human history. An attempt to bracket violence with Islam amounts to casting doubts upon the very eternity of the Islamic religion.

> According to the explicit command of the Qur'an, the call to God is the true and eternal mission of Islam.

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ so earnestly used to entreat his Lord in his daily prayer:

"O God, You are the original source of Peace; from You is all Peace, and to You returns all Peace. So, make us live with Peace; and let us enter paradise: the House of Peace. Blessed be You, our Lord, to whom belongs all Majesty and Honour!"

Goodword

Goodword Books
1, Nizamuddin West Market, New Delhi-110 013
Tel. +9111-41827083
Mob. +91-8588822672
email: info@goodwordbooks.com
www.goodwordbooks.com

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Peace in Islam

Peace in Islam

Islam is a religion of peace in the fullest sense of the word. The Qur'an calls its way 'the paths of peace' (5:16). It describes reconciliation as the best policy (4:128), and states that God abhors any disturbance of peace (2:205).

The root word of Islam is 'silm', which means peace. So the spirit of Islam is the spirit of peace. The first verse of the Qur'an breathes the spirit of peace. It reads:

> In the name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate.

This verse is repeated in the Qur'an no less than 114 times. It shows the great importance Islam attaches to such values as Mercy and Compassion. One of God's names, according to the Qur'an, is As-Salam, which means peace. Moreover the Qur'an states that the Prophet Muhammad (May peace be upon him) was sent to the world as a mercy to mankind. (21:107)

The Qur'an presents the universe as a model that is characterized by harmony and peace (36:40). When God created heaven and earth, He so ordered things that each part might perform its function peacefully without clashing with any other part. The Qur'an tells us that "the sun is not allowed to overtake the moon, nor does the night outpace the day. Each in its own orbit runs." (36:40)

A Religion of Peace

For billions of years, therefore, the entire universe has been fulfilling its function in total harmony with His divine plan.

These are only but a few references to show what great importance Islam attaches to peace. In fact, Islam cannot afford not to be in a state of peace because all that Islam aims at—spiritual progress, intellectual development, character building, social reform, educational activities, and above all missionary work—can be achieved only in an atmosphere of peace and harmony.

A perusal of the Qur'an shows that most verses of the Qur'an (and also the Hadith) are based on peace and kindness, either directly or indirectly.

Some people bracket justice with peace, but Islam does not subscribe to this notion. Islam believes in peace for the sake of peace. According to Islam, justice is not the direct result of peace. Peace only provides a framework within which we may work towards justice. There are so many examples in the life of the Prophet, which prove that the Prophet never bracketed justice with peace.

He always took peaceful circumstances as an opportunity to work for justice and did not attempt to derive justice directly from peace. The treaty of Hudaybiyya, between the Prophet and his opponents, provides one such clear example. From the details of the peace treaty, it is clear that no clause regarding justice was included. Obviously the conditions of this treaty were quite against justice. But the Prophet accepted this treaty, not because it was giving them justice, but because it was paving the way to work for justice.

The Qur'an calls its way 'the paths of peace'

Jihad and Qital

According to Islam, peace is the rule and war is only an exception. Even in defensive war we have to see the result. If the result is doubtful, Muslims should avoid war, even in a defensive situation.

It is true that jihad is one of the most important teachings of Islam. But jihad is not synonymous with war. In Islam, another word is used for war and fighting. This word is 'qital.' When the Qur'an refers to war or fighting, it uses the word qital and not jihad.

Islam aims at—spiritual progress, intellectual development, character building, social reform, educational activities, and above all missionary work.

Jihad literally means to strive or to struggle. So jihad actually means peaceful struggle, especially for da'wah work. The Qur'an says:

> Do great jihad with the help of the Qur'an. (25:52)

The Qur'an is simply a book, and not a sword, so "do great jihad with the Qur'an" means do great jihad with the ideological power of the Qur'an. In fact, jihad is only another name for peaceful activism. And peaceful activism is the only weapon by which Islam wants to achieve all its aims and objectives.

The Mission of All the Prophets

In actual fact, the mission of all the prophets, right from Adam to Christ (May peace be upon them all), was one and the same—of establishing the ideology of monotheism in the world, so that man might worship one God alone. As we know, there came a